

ON COMMEMORATING FALSE SHEPHERDS

*By Elder
Sabbas,
An Athonite
Ascetic*



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mon prayer and the holy mysteries [including communion].

1993 – The Balamand Agreed Statement, signed by the Churches of Constantinople, Alexandria, Antioch, Russia, Romania, Cyprus, Poland, Albania and Finland, accepts the Roman Catholic denomination as a “Sister Church” with fully valid sacraments.

1998 – Armenian [Monophysite] students enrolled at St. Vladimir’s Seminary (OCA) regularly receive holy communion at the chapel.

2001 – January 21. Sponsored by a coalition representing all the “Oriental and Eastern Orthodox” Churches in Southern California, Bishop Joseph [Antiochian Archdiocese], Bishop Moushegh [Armenian Apostolic], and Bishop Jovan [Serbian Orthodox] concelebrated with 40 clergy at an ecumenical doxology at Saint Sophia [Greek Archdiocese], LA, during which Coptic and Armenian hymns were sung. Metropolitan Eugene [Syriac Church], and Bishop Serapion [Coptic Church] were scheduled to attend but did not because of being unexpectedly called away.

2001 – The “British Antiochian Orthodox Deanery” of the Patriarchate of Antioch publishes a “Pastoral Guide to the Holy Mysteries,” endorsed by both Patriarch Ignatius II of Antioch and Archbishop Gabriel of Western and Central Europe. On p. 40 of this book, it states, “when there is no Orthodox church or there is no Orthodox priest, an easement is permitted whereby Orthodox persons may take holy communion in one of the Apostolic Churches, if it is with the knowledge of their spiritual father and the approval of their bishop.” What are these non-Orthodox “Apostolic Churches” that this document is talking about?

When in December of 1987 the Ecumenical Patriarch Demetrios concelebrated with the Pope of Rome, Father Sabbas, the respected Elder, and other ascetics separated themselves from the other fathers of Mount Athos and refused to go to church in any of the nineteen monasteries, cells or dependencies.

The other fathers of the nineteen Athonite monasteries believed that certain concessions and accommodations in matters of Faith must be made for a period of time; they remained in communion with the Ecumenists and continued to commemorate the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

Because so many of the commemorators persistently tried to persuade the Elder that he was in error, he answered them in writing. The Elder Sabbas remained firm in his good confession until his repose in October of 1991, and the commemorators were not allowed to hold memorial services at the grave of the Elder. Following is the text of the Elder’s letter.

The Cell of Saint Nicholas

August 13, 1991

Kapsala

Dear Father Nicodemus,

Bless!

During your visit to our cell a few days ago, you repeated your un-Orthodox dogmatic pronouncements that we are outside the Church because we do not commemorate Patriarch Demetrios. You

also made some other statements as well, for which cause we feel constrained to write the following for your fuller instruction, since the evidence and refutations we tendered during our conversation destroyed your peace and made you angry.

In the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers* it is written that when Abba Agatho was asked if he were proud, a fornicator, and a heretic, he answered that he confirmed the first two accusations, for it was profitable for his soul to do so, but not that he was a heretic, for that signifies separation from God. [1]

According to you (and according to all the monasteries of Mount Athos as well, except for the Monastery of Esphigmenou, the Skete of Prophet Elias, and many zealot Fathers), we are deceived

1. Sin and heresy, as the holy Fathers teach us, differ essentially: Sin is a transgression of God’s law, but heresy is an alteration of God’s law.



and are schismatics. You find it difficult to admit that the Patriarchate of Constantinople is preaching heresy, because you would be required to admit that your holding communion with these wolves and not shepherds is worthy of condemnation, or you would have to cease following them, according to the command of all the Holy Fathers and Councils.

You attempt to justify the Phanar, but their words and actions show you to be in error. In vain do you invoke the opinion of Father Paisios and of others who are indulgent with present conditions and make concessions, that is, they deal with it by "economy," but when the time comes (supposedly when Demetrios shall enter into communion with the Pope, as you said), you will separate yourselves from whatever is not in concord with the teachings of the Holy Fathers and Councils. You greatly deceive yourselves.

As for the admonitions to which you refer—whether of Elder Paisios, or of your neighbor papa-Isaac, or of anyone else—which maintain that Demetrios rightly divides the word of truth, how can you expect us to accept them as being pleasing to God when they are clearly contrary to Orthodox teaching? Since the Truth is betrayed, should it not be called iniquity rather than economy, concession, accommodation, or indulgence? You maintain your stand because Elder Paisios said, "Demetrios is misled by the hierarchs around him to do that which he does not want," and "If we stop commemorating [the Patriarch] we will be outside the Church!" and much more, to which can be applied the words of Saint John Chrysostom, "All their words are foolishness, and the tales of foolish children." These words of theirs are the fruit of a new theology, which the Phanar used in the notorious *Encyclical of 1920* by calling heretics "fellow heirs of the grace of God."

You bring forward the words of Saint John Chrysostom, "Not even the blood of martyrdom blots out schism," and of Saint Ignatius the God-bearer, "Let nothing be enacted without the bishop." You conclude that when we separate ourselves from our bishop, we are outside the Church.

The Saints made these true pronouncements, however, in a time of Orthodoxy and Church serenity. Today, when the hurricane of the Ecumenist pan-heresy sweeps away even the elect, the words of the same Saints have force. "If your bishop be heretical, flee, flee, flee as

herself, saying, "The enemies of My Son and of me are coming."

Last year, when the successor of Beccos—Demetrios (the "Leader of Orthodoxy")—arrived, he found the Holy Mountain swathed in black from two weeks of continuous fires. [4] He that hath ears to hear, heareth the voice of the All-holy Mother of God.

May you find the path of good disagreement, as Saint Nicodemos of the Holy Mountain teaches in his *Interpretation of the Fourteen Epistles of Saint Paul*, saying, "If he [the abbot or bishop] is evil in Faith, that is, he believes heretical and blasphemous doctrines, flee from him, though he be an angel from Heaven."

Elder Sabbas,
an un-monastic,
but Orthodox monk

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4. EDITORS' NOTE: The fire lasted from the first of August to the fifteenth, that is, the whole of the fast of the Theotokos.

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of Esphigmenou, Nov.-Dec., 1991 (in Greek).

UPDATE

The participation of "Onomatodox" [those who are Orthodox in name only] in the ecumenical movement proceeds apace, despite evidence of the glaring violations of the tradition, canons, and Faith of the holy Church. Following are some examples:

1986 – In his Nativity Epistle, Metropolitan Vitaly of the Russian Church Abroad re-defines the 1983 *Anathema against Ecumenism*. The hierarchy of the Russian Church Abroad synodically permits intercommunion with ecumenistic jurisdictions.

1989 – The Moscow Patriarch declares its intention to publish the Koran "for the disciples of the Prophet Mohammed" in Russia.

1991 – July 22. By Synodal decision, the Patriarchate of Antioch proclaims the Syriac Monophysite and the Melkite Uniate "sister" churches belonging to "One Faith," and mutually share in com-

have thought that fathers of the Holy Mountain would have as their bible the book *The Two Extremes* by Father Epiphaios Theodoropoulos? You recommend making protests like those recommended on pages 19 and 22 of that book, protests over—according to the Ecumenists—“sacred canons which are not applicable in our times because they are lacking in love.” He also describes Athenagoras as “having a demonic love.” Nevertheless, he remained in communion with those who have “a demonic love.” Marvelous consistency!

We saw similar protests on the occasion when the representative of the Monastery of Grigoriou asked that it be recorded in the decisions of the Sacred Community that if the chief secretary were sent to Australia, he would not concelebrate there. The chief secretary finally did not go; but Father Basil, Abbot of Stavronikita, ignoring the decision of all the other monasteries, sent Father Tychon to “help” Archbishop Stylianos Harkianakis. When Father Tychon returned, he was sent to the festival of the Cell of Bourazeri. There the representative of the Monastery of Grigoriou (Father Athanasios) concelebrated with Father Tychon and the rest. No commentary is needed.

Father Epiphaios Theodoropoulos was silenced when they refuted his errors some twenty years ago. But you, with the same untheological arguments, want to justify your communion with patriarchs who preach heresies “with bared head,” having a demonic love for heretics while persecuting the genuinely Orthodox, and so emulating Patriarch Beccos, the Emperor Copronymos, and all those like them. When you chant them *many years* and commemorate them, it is the same as if you said, “You are sound in the Faith, and obedience, honor, and commemoration are due to you.” You do not help them understand that they are walking upon an evil path; whereas if you had broken communion with them, mayhap they would have had pangs of conscience and would search for the truth. Your guilt for your reprehensible silence—which Saint Gregory Palamas calls a third kind of atheism—grows day by day, in spite of your so-called protests.

When the Latin-minded were coming here during the patriarchate of Beccos to enforce the union with the Latins, our Lady, the Virgin Mother, the Guardian of the Holy Mountain Athos, spoke

from fire and a serpent” (Saint John Chrysostom). “If thy bishop should teach any thing outside of the appointed order, even if he lives in chastity, or if he work signs, or if he prophesy, let him be unto thee as a wolf in sheep’s clothing, for he works the destruction of souls” (Saint Ignatius). If Demetrios rightly divided the word of truth, you would have been justified in your use of those quotations you took from the two Saints; but now you edit the Fathers’ writings to your taste, in order to justify your guilt for being a fellow-traveler of Demetrios, Parthenios of Alexandria, Iakovos of America, Stylianos Harkianakis of Australia. Are all the many quotations from the holy Councils and Saints not enough for you? Or do you fear, perhaps, being cast out of the synagogue of the heretics? The fact that the other patriarchates hold communion with the Phanar is not really important. What is important is, who follows in the footsteps of the Saints and is with the Truth? Parthenios, Patriarch of Alexandria, said that he recognizes Mohammed as an Apostle who worked for the Kingdom of God, and other such blasphemies which you know. There is no need for us to write again the heresies of Iakovos Koukouzis of America, and Stylianos Harkianakis of Australia. You are in communion with these men as though they supposedly rightly divided the word of truth! Who is going to condemn Iakovos Koukouzis? Parthenios? or the committee of Phanariotes under Bartholomew which has been “investigating” for two years now whether Harkianakis is a heretic? [2] Do you not understand that they do not want to pronounce a verdict?

The Phanar promised the delegation of three abbots from Mount Athos that they would retract and correct Patriarch Demetrios’ statement to the United Press about receiving communion from the Latins, that they would replace Stylianos Harkianakis as president of the commission for theological dialogue, etc. Has anything been corrected to this day? Or do you believe that we have no responsibility, or guilt, and may remain in communion because Elder Paisios shamelessly says that the declarations and actions of Demetrios are not contrary to our doctrines and do not violate the truth?

2. Editors’ Note: Harkianakis was accused of preaching heresy by Metropolitan Augustine of Florina and the Orthodox faithful from Australia.

History repeats itself. Saint Theodore the Studite, Saint Maximus the Confessor, and many of the other Christians who did not follow the hierarchy which at sundry times preached heresy, were all called schismatics by that hierarchy. Although Saint Gerasimus of the Jordan was served by a lion and was a wonderworker, he was in error because he would not accept the Fourth Ecumenical Council, drawing along with him thousands of monks in Palestine, until he was corrected by Saint Euthymius the Great and repented.

You ask "Could Elder Paisios and the seventy bishops of the State Church of Greece be in error?"

Do you want God to force them to confess Him? At the Iconoclast Council of 754 in the reign of Copronymos, we read in the minutes that fearsome acclamation of the 338 bishops present at the council, "Long live the King! The icons are idols and should either be destroyed or hung high so that they might not be venerated." Do you find it hard to believe that seventy bishops can be deceived today, when, as you see, so many were deceived then? Nowadays, monks desire to gain mitres, abbatial staves, while observing only a nominal confession of Faith—that is, protesting somewhat, but not stopping the commemoration of the Patriarch, and tolerating all the innovations to the Gospel introduced by Demetrios, Iakovos, Parthenios, and those like them. Saint Theodore the Studite, however, writes that the work of the monk is not to tolerate even the least innovation in the Gospel of Christ.

At the concelebration in Rome, Demetrios did not receive the host from the Pope in order to avoid hostile reactions from "conservatives." However, there in Rome, he did subscribe to the doctrine that the Latins possess the Mysteries of the Church, and he continues to do so. Is that not enough? When did the Saints and Christians of any century in which a heresy was widely preached ever react as do you, who continue to commemorate Demetrios? What precedent have you found in the history of the Church so you can say you are following it? If you are sons of the Saints (that is, imitators and followers of the Saints), "ye would have done the works of Abraham" as the Gospel says. In the time of Patriarch Beccos, the fathers of Mount Athos stopped commemorating him even though he had not been deposed by a Council; and because they remained

steadfast in their adherence to the precepts of the Fathers (that is, had no communion with those who departed from the Orthodox Faith), Christ granted them the martyr's crown. As for those who concelebrated with the commemorators of the Latin-minded "official" patriarch, Beccos, their corpses are found to this day, as is well known, swollen, stinking, and undecomposed, to be an example to all.

You told us that if Demetrios does not go to confession for the things he has done, he will be damned. You are now admitting that you are following a man who is damning himself by what he is doing. For him to be damning himself [and indeed, for matters pertaining to the Faith and not personal and private sins] means that he is doing the work of the Devil. Consequently, you yourself admit that you have the Devil as a fellow-traveler.

Are you serious, Father Nicodemos, or are you jesting? If Athenagoras had "repented" and confessed his sin shortly before he died, then would he be saved? [3] Show me even one patristic witness which justifies remaining in a Church that preaches heresy, as does that of the "meek and quiet Leader of Orthodoxy, Demetrios." Would such an obedience to a hierarchy that does not rightly divide the word of truth sanctify us? If you do not wish to admit that the Monastery of Esphigmenou and so many zealot Fathers are worthy of honor—according to the Fifteenth Canon of the First-and-Second-Council—at least be silent and do not blaspheme by saying that they are schismatics and outside the Church. You ignore the existence of the Testament of Saint Mark Evgenikos of Ephesus, who did not want the Latin-minded even to come to his funeral.

First study and then make pronouncements. According to your way of thinking, both Saint Mark of Ephesus, Saint Maximus the Confessor, and hosts of others who did not hold communion with heretics are outside the Church!

Do you see where your "new theology" leads? Who would ever

3. Private confession suffices for the forgiveness of personal and private sins, but for public sins against the Faith, a public repentance and correction must also be made according to our Saviour's words: "Whosoever, therefore, shall confess Me before men, him will I confess before My Father which is in Heaven. But whosoever shall deny Me before men, him will I deny before My Father which is in Heaven."